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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: NATO-GEORGIA NAC JUNE 18: FM TKESHELASHVILI
STRESSES PROGRESS ON DEMOCRATIZATION, MODERATION ON
SEPARATIST CONFLICTS

Classified By: DCM Richard G. Olson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Georgian FM Tkeshelashvili exchanged views with NATO PermReps June 18 on Georgia's democratic transition and its tensions with Russia. She acknowledged that the May 21 Parliamentary elections had not been perfect, but said they had avoided the worst shortcomings that observers had identified in the January Presidential vote, and that the government was reaching out to the opposition and working toward "developing a new political culture." She said that Russia's deployment of troops into Abkhazia without any mandate represented a dangerous step toward annexation, and credited statements from Allies and the SecGen for bolstering Georgia's restraint in the face of provocations. However, nothing short of a breakthrough with Russia would turn it from the "process of annexation" of Abkhazia that Putin had set in motion. Allied reps acknowledged that Georgia had made significant improvements in its electoral processes and praised Georgia's measured response to provocations. Several explicitly endorsed bringing it into the MAP process in December. Most, however, cited the need for continued reform before Georgia was ready to undertake a MAP. END SUMMARY

DEMOCRACY COMES FIRST

12. (C) Georgian Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili met with NATO Permanent Representatives on June 18, in Georgia's second "NAC plus 1" since launching "intensified engagement" with NATO at the April Bucharest Summit. She focused her opening remarks on Georgia's determination to achieve a pluralistic democracy. Acknowledging that the May 21 Parliamentary elections had not been perfect, she cited the steps the government had taken to rectify the far greater problems identified by international observers in the January Presidential vote. It had studied ODIHR recommendations, reorganized election Committees at all levels, trained election officials, and revised legislation to lower thresholds for small parties to form factions and be represented in Parliamentary committees. The ruling party was also engaging opposition groups to try to induce them into a more constructive relationship. These were important steps in meeting the challenge of "developing a new political culture" as a mature democracy.

MULTILATERALIZE THE PEACE PROCESS?

13. (C) After emphasizing Georgia's determination to meet NATO's democracy and rule of law standards, she turned to the

issue at the top of most PermReps' minds -- Tbilisi's dangerous standoff with Moscow over Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's separatist ambitions. Russia's deployment of railroad troops into Abkhazia had set off alarms, she said, as the first manifestation of President Putin's April 16 decree calling for state-to-state-like relations with Georgia's separatist regions. She said this "military (though not combat) operation" was preparing Abkhazia's infrastructure for conflict. It was also the first time that Moscow had introduced Russian forces without any mandate, not even an ostensible relation to its CIS "peacekeeping forces" already in Abkhazia. Tkeshelashvili said that Georgia was now engaged in intensive consultations with its friends and partners to prevent further escalation of tensions. She credited supportive statements from Allies and NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer for "helping our restraint" in the face of provocations. She was also encouraged by EU High Representative Javier Solana's reference to a potential EU role in addressing the frozen conflicts, seeing the prospect of multilateralization of the peace process as "changing the dynamic in a positive way." She reaffirmed Georgia's "full commitment to a peaceful resolution" of the conflicts.

INTENSIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH NATO

14. (C) Tkeshelashvili looked forward to the North Atlantic Council's visit to Tbilisi in September as a key element of NATO's intensive engagement, saying it would offer PermReps the opportunity to witness the nation's evolution and reforms first hand. Georgia's Individual Partnership Action Plan assessment was also scheduled for September. She said that

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those two events would feature prominently in the NATO Foreign Ministers' assessment of Georgia's readiness to begin MAP in December. Finally, Tkeshelashvili reminded PermReps that Georgia was punching above its weight as a contributor to NATO-led operations. Notably, its deployment of some 300 troops to Afghanistan would begin in September.

U.S.: STAY ON TRACK TO MAP

15. (C) U.S. DCM Olson praised Georgia's measured response to Russian provocations and welcomed its outreach to opposition parties that threatened to drop out of the political process. He said that we looked forward to visiting Georgia in September. Observing that U.S. support for a Georgia MAP was well known, he encouraged maintaining progress on electoral and other reforms in advance of the December NATO Foreign Ministerial MAP assessment.

ALLIES: GOOD WORK, DO MORE

16. (C) Twenty-three other Allied representatives (all except Luxembourg and Slovenia) responded with more questions and recommendations. Recognizing improvements in the electoral process, while calling for further reforms, especially in engaging opposition groups constructively in legislative and governmental decision-making, was a universal theme. Another was recognition of Georgia's restraint in the face of serious provocations, such as its suspension of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle flights over the separatist regions, and the need to continue that restraint at all costs. Most also looked forward to visiting Georgia in September, and cited elements of the just-completed NAC visit to Ukraine that had proven most useful to them. The Baltic and Central European Allies made some of the most positive interventions, expressing "broad satisfaction" with the conduct of the Parliamentary elections and endorsing the Bucharest Summit statement that Georgia would one day be a member of the Alliance. Romania praised Georgia's "amazing resilience" to tests. Romania, Canada, Slovakia and Iceland explicitly endorsed bringing it into the MAP process in December. Canada led a chorus of appreciation for Georgia's deployment to ISAF. Most Allies' critical remarks were couched in terms of needing to do more of what was already being done, although the Netherlands

asked about the status of some activists who had been beaten and their houses searched by police. France and Germany carefully alluded to the December Ministerial as being only the "first" assessment of Georgia's readiness for MAP.

RUSSIA ON A "CONFLICT SPIRAL"

¶7. (C) Tkeshelashvili responded briefly to all points. The true test of elections was whether they offered citizens freedom of choice about their government, she said, and the answer was clearly "yes." News media had to provide the opportunity for citizens to hear alternative views, and that had also been provided. Tkeshelashvili said the government was committed to engaging opposition parties in public debate and decision-making; there, she acknowledged, it had not done so well, although some opposition groups were prepared to be constructive. She delivered her main punch lines on frozen conflicts: Georgia's continued restraint had avoided outright combat, but it was "not working" to de-escalate tension and was not being reciprocated by Russia. She stressed that Russian withdrawal of its non-"peacekeeping" troops from Abkhazia, no further implementation of the April 16 declaration on the separatist regions, and Russia's readiness to engage seriously in a peace process were necessary steps to move forward. Instead, Moscow rejected an international role in mediating the frozen conflicts, it intimidated Abkhazians from negotiating directly with Georgia, and refused to accept Georgia's ambition to join the Alliance, putting it on "conflict spiral" with Georgia.

GEORGIA NEEDS A BREAKTHROUGH

¶8. (C) Tkeshelashvili concluded that nothing but a breakthrough with Russia could turn it from the process of annexation of Abkhazia that Putin had set in motion. She implied that President Medvedev might be amenable to such a change if the West would send a strong and consistent message. In that context, she hoped that a further NAC plus

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Georgia on the conflict situation would be held in July; that HR Solana would work out a step-by-step approach to de-escalate tensions when he met with President Saakashvili on June 20; and that a Joint Statement at the NAC visit to Georgia would serve to convince Moscow to back away from conflict.

AFTER-ACTION DISCUSSION

¶9. (C) In a follow-on lunch with Tkeshelashvili, PermReps revealed differences in their approach to Georgia's MAP aspirations. The U.S. and Canada, supporting MAP for Georgia as soon as possible, traded points with some Europeans, who could not get beyond the mantra of "continue restraint and reform." UK Ambassador Eldon argued for an intensive peace process with Abkhazia and Russia. Tkeshelashvili said that if Russia did not de-escalate tensions, Georgia's "options are limited," and that recent events demonstrated that the CIS mandate would not restrain Russian actions. The Netherlands rep said that the Abkhazians hold the key to resolving the conflict; Canada's McRae suggested that Sukhumi should be shown that "the road to Europe passes through Tbilisi." He predicted that Russia would continue to make provocations until Georgia gets into MAP.

NULAND